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# Maine Fire Marshal News, September 2011

Maine Office of State Fire Marshal

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# Maine Fire Marshal News

Maine State Fire Marshal's Office • Fire Research  
Maine Department of Public Safety  
Fire Marshal's Web Page

September 2011

Fall 2011 Vol. 2, Issue No. 11

## WELCOME!

Welcome to this issue of the *Maine Fire Marshal News*. Please take some time to read the newsletter and send us your own article for a future publication or comments in general. As always, we do appreciate the feedback on the newsletter many of you have sent over the years and look forward to hearing from you more in the future.



### A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

Fall is here and among the many activities under way at the Fire Marshal's Office, that I'm excited about is the development and production of four new fire related public service announcements (PSA).

We've been very fortunate to receive funding through the DHS Fire Prevention and Safety Grants over the past two years to do PSAs. Last year we focused the PSAs on heating safety, carbon monoxide, smoke detectors, escape planning and summer fire. This year

we will be producing spots on juvenile fire setting, chimney fires, sprinklers, and of course, fireworks.

Last year a combined 2,300 radio and TV spots were aired from Aroostook to York county. We're hoping to get the same number and geographic distribution this year. In addition to developing and producing the spots we also surveyed Maine residents as to their awareness of these issues and actual use of mitigation plans and devices addressed in the media spots. Last year's results were interesting.

Pan Atlantic SMS Group out of Portland conducted the survey of Maine voters in 2010 and 2011. The survey strongly represents Maine's voters by age, political affiliation, income, and gender mix. Among many findings, the survey found that 98% of Mainer's indicated they had working smoke alarms in their homes. About 57% indicated they had a working carbon monoxide alarm. What surprised us most was that 90% claimed to have made an escape plan for getting out of the house during a fire.

Other important questions we asked included "Do you or a professional clean and inspect your furnace / stove / heater every year? About 87 % replied yes though only 41.3% indicated they had their chimney cleaned annually (maybe that's why we have 500 chimney fires each year?). Finally, the survey revealed that most Maine residents heat their

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homes with oil (62%); 13% with wood stoves; and 11.5% with gas. In general the smoke detector findings support previous research on usage.

Across demographic groupings we found that people earning more tend to have carbon monoxide detectors more so than those earning less. Smoke detectors on the other hand seem to be used by a wider array of wage groupings. Interestingly, people earning less who are also younger had an escape plan. This is a positive because these are our states parents and they need to have a plan. When it comes to cleaning heating equipment middle income earners rank higher and the distribution across age groups is pretty even. There was little variation in the 2010 survey compared to that conducted in 2011.

This year's plans for public service announcements will include the survey as well. We'll look forward to bringing these messages to Maine's citizens and seeing what they think and know about topics such as fireworks, chimney fires, juvenile fire issues, and sprinklers. Along with investigations and inspections work, public education and awareness programming is interesting. We can only hope that some fires didn't start last year and that some people avoided injury as a result of our public service announcements.

Now, I'd like to wish you and yours, on behalf of the entire Fire Marshal's Office staff, a pleasant fall season. Enjoy the color!

Sincerely,



John C. Dean  
Fire Marshal



## **GOVERNOR PROCLAIMS SEPTEMBER CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY MONTH**

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

Governor Paul R. LePage has joined 34 other U.S. Governors in proclaiming September Campus Fire Safety Month. Since 2000 more and more Governors have signed such proclamations and for good reasons.

Between January 2000 and September 2011, 146 people have died in campus-related fires, both on and off-campus, and countless others have been burned, lost their housing, personal belongings and school work in fires. The annual event designed to raise public awareness about this issue was started by Ed Comeau at *CampuFirewatch*. According to Ed, a civil engineer, Campus Fire Safety Month started in 2000 to help fill a need, and it was very successful and actually led to the creation of other organizations focused on campus safety issues.

Ed wrote a chapter on campus fire safety for the current edition of the NFPA Fire Protection Handbook and produced the video *Graduation: Fatally Denied*. He has extensive experience as a fire investigator and continues now to push lawmakers in an effort to make America's college campuses safer.

If you visit the Campus Fire Watch web page you can find many valuable items including a list of questions parents can ask when visiting a school or choosing housing, to make an informed decision. This is critically important for off-campus housing, where 85% of the fire fatalities have occurred. This resource is just one among many along with a collection of stories about very unfortunate and unnecessary events that have occurred, though preventable, on our nation's college campuses.

Maine's fire service joins Governor LePage in his proclamation and appreciates his recognizing that this is a preventable tragedy we all have a roll in stopping.

## MEFIRS – Maine Fire Incident Reporting System

	Current Statistics 2011*	Final Statistics for 2010
Total Calls:	23,775	74,840
Fire Calls:	1,210	3,439**
Rescue Calls:	15,738	49,754
All others:	6,827	25,647
Fire Departments Reporting	129	180
Total Fire Dollar Loss	\$11,776,339	\$27,511,716
Civilian Fire Related Injuries	22	37
Fire Service Fire Related Injuries	8	31
Civilian Fire Related Deaths	18***	9***
Fire Service Fire Related Deaths	0***	0***

\* The Fire Marshal's Office will have all data for 2010 in by June-July of 2011.

\*\* Represents single incidents only.

\*\*\* Based on SFMO Investigations.

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### *Consumer Fireworks in Maine*

As of January 1, 2012 certain consumer fireworks will be legal in Maine and it is now time for Maine police and fire departments around the state to make the best of it and ensure that no one gets hurt. Law enforcement, regulation and public education about the products will help. However, in order to target regulatory and public education efficiently, we're going to need to keep track of the number of fires caused by fireworks, injuries, and the type of fireworks involved. CDC reports will provide us with information regarding the age, location of injury, time of year and overall count of injuries in a given year. In MEFIRS we'll be able to track fires resulting from firecrackers as follows:

**1. Basic Module: To collect information on all incidents.**

**a. Incident Type:**

- i. 243 Fireworks explosion (no fire), included are all classes of fireworks.
- ii. Fires that occur as a result of fireworks should use incident types 100 series (fires) then the heat source should be documented.
- iii. Injuries that occur as a result of fireworks should use the incident types in the 300 series. Remember you will need to complete the EMS module.

**2. Fire Module:**

**a. Heat source codes:**

- i. 54 Fireworks. Included are sparklers, paper caps, party poppers, and firecrackers.
- ii. 50 Explosives. Fireworks, other

**3. Wildland Fire Module:**

**a. Heat Source Codes**

- i. 54 Fireworks. Included are sparklers, paper caps, party poppers, and firecrackers.
- ii. 50 Explosives. Fireworks, other
- iii. Activity of Person involved:  
21 Fireworks use

**4. The Arson and EMS modules contain additional reporting options if needed.**

For information on MEFIRS contact us at 626-3872. Thank you.

*"Fight Fire with Facts"*



Would you let your child play with fire?

Every year thousands of Americans, mostly children, are hurt by consumer fireworks such as sparklers and firecrackers. Many are burned, scarred or disfigured by fireworks that are legal, but still very dangerous and cause fires. This year, an alliance of health and safety advocates asks you to keep fireworks from hurting your family. The risk is too great.

*Leave fireworks to the professionals.*

National Fire Protection Association along with American Academy of Family Physicians • American Academy of Ophthalmology • American Academy of Pediatrics • American Association for Hand Surgery • American Association of Public Health Physicians • American Burn Association • American College of Emergency Physicians • American Society of Plastic Surgeons • Emergency Nurses Association • Fire Department Safety Officers Association • International Association of Arson Investigators • International Association of Fire Chiefs • International Association of Fire Fighters • International Fire Marshals Association • Metropolitan Fire Chiefs • National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners • National Association of School Nurses • National Association of State Fire Marshals • National Volunteer Fire Council • Prevent Blindness America

## **RICH MCCARTHY IS MAINE'S NEW ASSISTANT FIRE MARSHAL**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

**Rich McCarthy has been appointed to be the new Assistant State Fire Marshal for the licensing and inspections division replacing Nelson Collins who retired in June. Nelson had held the post for many years.**

**Rich will oversee all aspects of the office responsible for construction plans review, inspections, engineering, building codes and standards. Rich brings a considerable amount of experience and skill to the position.**



Assistant Maine State Fire Marshal, Rich McCarthy

**Rich has been with the office for over 10 years and for the last three years has served as the head of the construction plans review section. Rich has a degree in architecture with extensive direct experience in the building construction trade. Rich has also been involved in the State's new building and energy code development and implementation and has served as the representative of our office and the Maine Fire Chiefs Association on the Technical Codes Board. He is also a member of the NFPA/IFMA Northeastern Regional Fire Code Development Committee.**

**Rich, his wife, and their two sons live in Belgrade and are actively involved in youth sports. He is an extremely well respected individual and we wish him the very best in this new position.**

## **HURRICANE IRENE**

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

**Hurricane Irene hit Maine on Sunday, August 28th causing significant power outages and damage, particularly in the western half of the state.**

**At one point the storm is said to have knocked out power to thousands of Maine residents. Though diminished to a tropical storm by the time it reached Maine, the storm still packed some power. Note the surfer on Lake Sebago below on the next page.**





Sebago Lake Surfer during Hurricane Irene

## **MAINE FIREWATCH**

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

A discarded cigarette is to blame for this Winslow fire (below) that left a woman and her dog homeless as the mobile home they lived in was completely destroyed. Fortunately, because the fire occurred in the middle of the day the woman was able to grab the dog and escape the fire.



Winslow Mobile Home Fire

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, the Galaxy Nightclub in the heart of Old Orchard Beach was destroyed by a fire. The timing was bad considering it was the middle of the summer and the nightclub business was already slow. Fortunately, the Old Orchard Beach Fire Department was able to contain the fire. The nightclub was set for to have a sprinkler system installed in September.



Galaxy Nightclub Fire in Old Orchard Beach

A three-story apartment building went up in flames after two juveniles allegedly threw matches onto the porch. The whole incident was apparently monitored by two neighbors who alerted the fire and police departments as well as two residents on the second floor of the building. That alert probably saved lives as those escaping did so just as the entire building was engulfed in flames.



Fireman on ladder at the Waterville Apartment Fire

In one of the more unusual fires to have taken place since the last newsletter, an arsonist set fire to a State Fire Marshal's car being used to investigate that arsonist. As you can tell from the picture below the vehicle and all contents were lost. Fortunately however, neither one of the investigators who had parked the car were hurt in any way.



ATF Agent Examines Maine Fire Marshal's Vehicle

# **MAINE FIRE MARSHALS & OTHERS INVESTIGATION LEADS TO ARSON GUILTY PLEA**

By Richard E. Taylor, Senior Research and Planning Analyst

This arson investigation was one of the more unusual investigations conducted by this office since I've been here. This case came about when police and fire personnel arrived at Robert Infante's home in response to a reported explosion.

When first responders arrived they found numerous marihuana plants growing in Infante's home. Along with the marijuana were pipe bombs, firearms and ammunition. Infante apparently had the arsenal for the purpose of protecting his marijuana operation.

Maine Fire Marshal's along with the State Police Bomb squad, Maine Drug Enforcement Agency and the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives worked with Alfred Fire Department to assist in the investigation that led to Infante pleading guilty to charges of possession of unregistered destructive devices; possession of firearms and ammunition by a convicted felon; manufacturing marijuana; and possession of a destructive device during and in relation to a drug trafficking offense.

## ***\*Corrections:***

In our last issue I inaccurately stated that John Morse, retired Fire Marshal's Office investigator, worked with Midnight, a retired and deceased K-9. It was brought to my attention the John was actually the handler of JJ and Amy two other K-9s. Rick Shepard was the handler of Midnight. Sorry Rick and John!



<http://www.smokefreeforme.org/>

## **This Month in Fire History**

Chicken processing plant fire kills 25, Hamlet (NC), 1991  
Powder mill explosion kills 19, Fairchance (PA), 1904  
World Trade Center attack kills 2,666  
Hercules Powder Company plant explosion kills 52, Kenil (NJ), 1940  
Ponet Square Hotel fire kills 19, Los Angeles (CA), 1970  
First sprinkler system patented by P.W. Pratt, 1872  
Yell of "fire" in church causes 100+ to be trampled to death, Birmingham (AL), 1902  
Study Club fire kills 22, Detroit (MI), 1929  
Conflagration destroys 386 buildings and kills 13, Bandon (OR), 1936  
Gasoline tank car explosion kills 43, Ardmore (OK), 1915  
First fireboats arrive in the US, New York (NY), 1800  
Dwelling fire kills 12, Milwaukee (WI), 1987

## ***Waterville, ME Airship Fire, Sept 1908***

*WATERVILLE, Me., Sept. 2.---In full view of 25,000 spectators on the Maine fair grounds to-day Charles Oliver Jones, the well-known aeronaut of Hammondsport, N. Y., fell a distant of 500 feet to his death. Among the witnesses of the frightful plunge were Mrs. Jones and her child. The aeronaut expired about an hour and a half after the accident. Jones had been at the fair grounds with his dirigible baloon[sic],... known as the Strobel airship, since Monday, the opening day of the fair. To-day he arranged to make a flight between 3 and 4 o'clock, but such a high wind prevailed that a delay was necessary. At 4:30 o'clock conditions had modified...and he gave the word to have the machine released. When the aeronaut reached a height of more than 500 feet the spectators saw small tongues of fire issuing from under the gas bag in front of the motor. At this time the balloon had passed out of the fair grounds. Many persons in the great crowd shouted to Jones of his danger, but several minutes elapsed before he noticed the fire. Then he grasped the rip cord and endeavored to reach the earth. The machine descended but a short distance when a sudden burst of flame enveloped the gas bag, the framework immediately separating from it.*

*New York Times, New York, NY 3 Sept 1908*

## UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### THE 23<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL FIRE & LIFE SAFETY EDUCATION CONFERENCE

#### "Teaching Today for a Safer Tomorrow"

October 14 & 15, 2011  
Ramada Inn in Saco, Maine

The conference will include keynote speaker Jim Crawford of Vision 20/20 among other great speakers and presenters. For more information on the conference go to:

<http://www.ptbf.org/>



2011 MMA Convention | October 5 & 6, 2011 |  
Augusta Civic Center- Augusta, Maine

For full information go to the url below:

<http://www.mainechiefes.com/>



#### Maine Health Falls Prevention Summit

Tuesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>  
9AM - 3:30PM MaineHealth  
110 Free St., Portland, Maine  
FMI Contact: Michelle at  
[neverm@mainehealth.org](mailto:neverm@mainehealth.org)  
Space is limited

*If you have an announcement or upcoming event you'd like to post in this newsletter please feel free to forward it to us using the contact information below. The next issue will be in September 2011.*



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To submit articles for publication contact the Fire Marshal's Office at (207) 626-3870 and ask to speak with the editors. You may also e-mail an article or comment to [Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov](mailto:Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov)

Articles submitted for publication in this newsletter from outside sources do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the State Fire Marshal's Office.

All articles are subject to an editorial staff review prior to inclusion. For a copy of submission requirements contact the editorial staff.

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